CHOOSE YOUR DOMAIN

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Choose Your Domain

A Guild for Claiming Your Domain

By Koketso Mathinjwa

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INTRODUCTION

Being online is no longer a choice but a requirement to achieve any notable success in most of the business sectors. Not only has technology made it easier to trade and provide services it's also slowly becoming the norm/standard in commercial business practices the benefits are endless the cons are few.

Contrary to this knowledge being publicly known, did you also know that many small businesses are not offering their services or products online?

Why are small businesses not competing on the online market?

I believe it's the fear of change or being uninformed about the realities of being online

Although, as circumstances do differ so may the reasons but commonly these are my main two opinions, based on my observations/experience as a designer and the many readily available statistics, a lot of the statistics are very true when considering the facts I've come across on the ground

In actuality going online or leveraging social media to benefit your business can be very simple but like most things worth doing in life, it's not easy in the beginning.

The knowledge is available from multiple sources and has been the go to for many content creators everywhere so it seems as if it's not valuable or in some cases it's not presented in a user-friendly/relatable manner sometimes outdated.
The information is sometimes very technical e.g. *Understanding how connections work or the instructions to setup the CNAME/A/MX Records.*

You have to learn how things work as well as how to make them work constantly by maintaining and keeping up with the new innovations of old the processes as well as the completely new systems. Professional help is available if you know where to look and how to look, which can make it affordable if you commit to the due diligence throughout the whole process.

Taking the first perception of an idea or the instructions on how to do something as easy to do is very normal and we all fall prey to it. "*You think it's easy you try, you fail and you give up, everybody goes through this*"

Personally I stopped giving up after I started studying every aspect of whatever task I'm trying to do, so when I fail I know how, why or where I failed, then take the corrective measures.

Truth of the matter is anything that you haven't done before looks difficult in the beginning. When it comes to going online new business owners often struggle with the following three things (most of the time)

1. Overpay for everything
2. Give up too early after not getting immediate results
3. Bad Service provider

1. Overpay for everything

If you are persistent with your search for a good price or an understandable compromise you won't be overcharged, if you don't do price comparisons then you will be overpaying most of the time, few middle grounds exist in this regard online

The proven way to spend less is doing some of the things yourself (Services) / getting the raw materials/means of production. Insourcing the skills needed to navigate the tools that make it easier to succeed online would be the main focus in the beginning

Basically by Learning
- How it works
- How to make it work
- How to fix it
- How to make it better

2. Give up too early after not getting immediate results

In an overall sense, business is a persistence game that's never ending. As long as you keep playing the game persistence is a key factor. Those on the top know it and hence they stay there. It takes an honest mistake to ruin a business forever… none the less a careless one, most new business owner don't see this in the beginning much to their detriment obviously.

3. Bad Service provider

A lot of the time people underestimate the need for good branding and how its impact will be good or bad for the product/business

It all depends on how much effort and expertise is invested in finding a suitable voice/style for your brand.

Again the issue arises when you employ someone who knows how to use the machines/software but is not very skilled in the craft; some have no respect for the process and rush through it, only focusing on getting paid for the job not the outcome/impact of the finished product.

A lot of things are taken into account when designing a functional website suitable for your brand

Things like

- UX and UI
- Branding
- Loading time
- Security
- Cost

To Conclude the Intro, Why Should You Be Online?

The benefits are endless and it's quickly becoming the norm, **besides… don't you what to sell to world?** *Simple Answer!*

Think of it like this…
If the whole world is online and that's where your selling who are you selling to?

Some of the Notable Pro's for being online

*Credibility - Businesses online enjoy more credibility
*Market Expansion - More traffic means more sales
*Advertising - Cost effective, more persistent and direct
*Customer Service - An affordable and easy way to say connected to your customer

CHAPTER ONE

What to call it…

What is a Domain Name?

Having a domain name is crucial to obtaining space on the internet otherwise how will people find your website? So to put it plainly it's the address of your website.

The history of domains is worth taking a look at, it's very brief but there is a lot to take from it, the highlights being how valuable a domain can be, the notable domains and their reasons for success. In between the lines you also learn the risks and rewards associated with domain ownership

The following is a breakdown of the domain name (extensions)

1. The Generic top-level domains (**GTLDs**)

- .com/.net/.org/.gov/.edu/.int/.mil

  (These are the original and most common GLTDs)

2. Generic-restricted top-level domains **(grTLD)**

- These are reserved for specific registrants/industries e.g.
  .aero – Only for air-transport industry
  .bank – Only for banking institutions
  .cpa – Only for licensed CPAs and CPA firms

The list is very long…

3. Sponsored top-level domains **(sTLD)**

- These are limited to specific communities/entities e.g.
  .gov traditionally reserved for the US Government but also now abbreviated for other governments such as
  .gov.za – (South African Government)
  .amazon – Reserved for the company Amazon
  .apple – Reserved for the company Apple

4. Country code top-level domains **(ccTLD)**

- These are exclusively reserved for specific countries with the exception of a few
  For example:

.ml – Mali	co.uk – United Kingdom
.tk – Tokelau	.co.za – South Africa
.ga – Gabon	.au – Austrailia
.gq – Equatorial Guinea	.cn – China
**These are unrestricted*	**These are restricted*

5. Test top-level domains **(tTLD)**

- This refers to the .test domain *(and others)* not meant for public use and only reserved for testing

The Digital Real Estate

Securing a domain name is the first step when going online, this is more like a phone number more than it is like an address but yes it's your web address **www.ChosenName.(Com/Net/Org)** I say a phone number because it's the combination of characters that connects you to the website.

Then the site needs a space to occupy a **Host** and as long as connections to that space are available so will the website.
This is like your website's home; it's called a Web Hosting Platform/Service which can change unlike your domain name which obviously cannot change as frequently without valid reason or without losing traffic

E.g. your address **(Domain)** is how I find your site and your **(Host)** is where the actual data of your website is kept.

You pay for both Domain & Host but with persistence you can find free domains with limitations or free hosting with loads of additional services free or paid.

Domain: Paid once a year or free
Host: Paid monthly in most cases or free

Enter 2021

At this present moment there are hundreds of domain name extensions to choose from and it would be difficult to name them all and their various potential uses without overlooking a great deal. They all have their individual benefits so your choice should depend on the needs of your business.

The good thing is there are more chances to get the domain name you really want. It's also safe to say having so many options really levelled the playing field drastically.

Pre 2011 The big challenge has always been availability, it's not that hard to come up with a short catchy word or acronym for your company's website if you really try, the problem arises when you try registering your domain and it's taken, sometimes not even being used for what the domain name insinuates or represents, It could sometimes be ads or perhaps a scam. *As a result of the pre-mentioned problem of availability, people saw an opportunity to capitalize on speculated domain names they thought people would be interested in…*

The "MO" for speculated domain name purchasing would be to buy up all the ones you think people would want at the regulated/competitive price and wait for the offers to come rolling in and as the official owner of the domain name you dictate the price.

Now consider this; a domain can be as cheap as 1-10 from a **domain registrar** as a standard fee but if I own it already the registrars have no control or regulations over how much I charge you after I purchased it.

At times the scenario is justified e.g. I bought and used the domain for a number of years and no longer need it because the company that I needed the website for no longer exists and if I opted for the longest duration of ownership when registering the domain nothing changes even if I don't use it anymore it's still mine. Regardless of how much I paid for it what I think its worth now is my estimation to make. **Why is it justified?** Well… During the time that I used the website I paid for its promotion and actively generated traffic to the site so a mark-up on the initial registration fee is understandable though it is still unregulated which leaves room for a lot of unethical behaviour, *Overpricing/Domain hoarding*…

Buying an Existing Domain

Even though the website may no longer exists, the domain may or may not still be active, if it is active it might bare a message informing the old customers about the closure of the business, thanks & appreciation and sometimes an alternative source(s) for the service or product. What you would also commonly find is advertising as well as a "**domain name for sale**" sign with the contact details listed

The New Ones

Since 2011 **ICANN** - *(INTERNET CORPARATION FOR ASSIGNED NAMES & NUMBERS)* has been introducing new TLD's to increase the existing namespace as well as making it more diverse by adding more than a thousand new TLD's

The new general TLDs aim to solve the prior mentioned problem of availability by creating a wider variety with multiple uses for each one, this doesn't just open up new opportunities for the online market but a whole new array of possibilities for commercial businesses small to multinational, what are these new possibilities? *Here are Some Examples:*

1. **Complimenting your company/organisation name**

- As mentioned before numerous corporations/entities have their own TLD's to name a few more:
  .audible .google
  .bestbuy .youtube
  .foodnetwork .sling

- Another scenario would be if your company name ends with any of these: e.g. Joe's Café = **www.joes.cafe**
  .boutique .cafe .auto .trading
  .zone .media .agency .studio

2. Complimentary to your trade/craft e.g. Jane's Photography studio = **www.jane.photography**

.plumber	.music	.network	.store
.productions	.actor	.events	.media

The aim would be a memorable/catchy name that will make you stand out or even spelling out your trading name completely only separated by a **(Dot.)** then the appropriate (.TLD)

The benefits are not just about guaranteed availability but also memorability

Definitions of:

Domain Registrar – *A domain name registrar is a company that manages the reservations and allocations of internet domain names .e.g.*

- Namecheap -Bluehost -HostGator
-GoDaddy -HostGator -Google domains

Sub Domain – *A sub division of a domain .e.g.*

*If your domain name is **www.awesomeness.com** you can create a staff only subdomain by adding **.staff** to the beginning **www.staff.awesomeness.com** then dedicate this domain to staff only or whatever the case may be, without paying extra as the domain is already yours the number of sub domains could be unlimited **T&C's may apply***

The Challenges

As all things in life, the good often comes with the bad so in conclusion of this chapter let me go over The Challenges associated with being online

1. Constant Maintenance - The work is never ending whether it's the constant enquiries or the need to decorate seasonally or as often as the need to arises e.g. *Changes to AD campaigns/Specials*

- Communicating with your consumer/customer becomes a norm - *being online creates the expectations and it reflects badly on your brand if you don't.*

- Complaints and enquiries are the order of the day but no worries each present an opportunity to show positive engagement which is what consumers look for in a brand.

Another thing to consider is…

You Need Creativity to Compete - Only the best looking Ads/Campaigns get attention. This is a challenge most people will encounter when engaging/promoting on social media platforms at first; essentially the posts that get attention vs the ones that don't will illustrate this fact quite clearly

The Problem usually starts with an unclear or an uncertain brand voice or creative direction. Normally if you have a distinctive brand voice it's easier to translate it into your creative decisions, it functions as a great guild and a much valued starting point, which is what some creatives generally struggle with.

2. Cost - Depending on the magnitude of your enterprise it can get expensive to source professionals and in house skills can only go so far… sometimes a fresh perspective is needed

Another factor in relation to cost is down time and the loss of productivity as a result. This could be from equipment damage, theft, cyber-attacks or even corporate espionage sometimes. Naturally paying for security is the norm depending on the value of your IT infrastructure as well as its contributions to the final product or service

3. A Shortage of Skills - Professionals are few and far between, *very skilled professionals are fewer & further apart*…

- The latter also applies to Graphic Designers although a lot are available, you may find that only a few have a strong understanding of Visual Communication, most are basically CAD Application Users.

"Bad design is everywhere" is a term you will understand when you understand design.

It's funny because our visual communication skills are more evolved than our linguistic communication skills but the prior isn't common knowledge people seldom question the deeper motivations of brands when they take the creative direction they take.

Nobody asks what the intent is. Most assume they went with what looked like the best or the funniest option, fact of the matter is; if it has viral impact it was carefully planned, there's always a motive and target.

The bigger the company the more they spend to shape the image of their company in mass, this is where consistency plays a big part, the aim is for the branding to communicate a unison message because a distinctive character should be perceived from your brand voice. In most cases if the image or voice resonates, you easily became a consumer/customer or a potential referral to a consumer/customer.

CHAPTER TWO

"The first choice is always the hardest

And the most important"

Choosing your Domain

It's a known fact that decisions are more difficult to take if you have a lot of options to choose from and thus the chaos begins.

The Domain Name

What you call your business's website is very important and in a way it sets the mood for your digital presence, as well as the tone of the brand voice. Naturally your digital media is an extension of your branding. "But why not the name of your business" you may ask….Well the short answer is that in most cases it doesn't work because to get the best results there's a certain criteria you must adhere to and like all good things the best names are already taken…

What makes a good domain name?

1. Simplified - This insures that your domain name is easier to remember. The way to go about this is to abbreviate or find a synonym.

Fact: Before the new TLD's where released all possible 4 letter combination domain names were registered meaning it was likely to come from a 3rd party not a registrar

2. Catchy - If it's long, it surely will take some effort to remember this means misspellings would also be common, a **(very big no-no)** these misspellings are advantages to scam artists, they register a domain name almost identical to yours as well as create a site that's also identical to yours then lure your customers to it (mainly through emails).

The aim is to steal their information, since the misspellings are not your domain though similar to yours only differing by a letter or two, perhaps a number, some might easily fall for it.*(See Chapter 3: Risks)*

3. Compliant with your branding – Keep in mind your brand voice/style must be prioritized at all times. To further personify your business everything you do must be in unison.***E.g. If your branding is conservative, loud, friendly or serious, your domain name should be as well***

With these three points as a guild and some research you should be able to come up with a good name.

Getting Hosted

Once you have a domain name the next step is to find a home for it but before I proceed, a quick recap

Domain Name - The address of your website www._____.com

Website Host - Your website is nothing more than code/information and media. A host is where you store this data

There are a lot of host sites available just like the domain registrars. There's a lot to consider when choosing your host unlike a domain registrar where the only major considerations is price, customer service or other benefits e.g. email support

When choosing a host the first question is what are the needs of your business? And what would you like to achieve with your website? ***Here are the two options:***

1. Coded from Scratch

These Websites are skill intensive which makes them harder to manage and maintain, usually this option is viable when an in house programmer/developer and graphic designer is available

Few limitations are presented with this route. You code what you need your website to do, much like a program then it's uploaded to the host or your own server and run from there, normally a third party app will be used to manage the website for these apps you need a "dashboard" such as

Cpanel - Control Dashboard that enables you to manage your web hosting server with a user-friendly, web-based interface.

2. Web Builder

A host with a web builder uses a new way to build websites without using coding; you simply drag and drop the components you need and at other times they use **AI**

In most cases this is the easiest method as anyone can do it without any design or coding knowledge. You can use templates that are tailored to your specific business sector.

Though enticing there are lots of limitations if there's a lot you expect from your website, the basics will probably be covered rest assured but if you wanted a special or specific feature you would need to "Embed" some code or a third-party application.

The prior **(.1)** requires skill **(Coding)** anything is possible and sometimes the latter **(.2)** could be free or sometimes requires funds on a monthly/yearly basis but is limited to what services are offered **(Web-Builder)**

From the brief explanations of the two most common types of Website Hosting Services an informed decision can be reached if the needs of your website are clear and known, this even more so if the pros and cons are weighed on each potential **Hosting Service** you find.

Designing Your Website

Do it yourself

Recent innovations in CAD software has made it possible for almost anyone to learn or create digital designs; YouTube is the greatest source of knowledge and training in this regard.

Good designs are achievable when it comes to the usual digital media such as advertising or social media content but with websites and their contents it gets somewhat tricky but with a little bit of knowledge about marketing and design you can also design your own website.

Before I continue let me further elaborate on the knowledge you need.

Design - Colour and Font play a crucial role in visually communicating your brand voice/traits/style.

Colour Palette/Proportion or Style are all more easily understood if you know *"The Principles/Elements of Design"* so that's a good place to start accumulating a knowledge base.

Marketing - A good book on sales or an online marketing course should do the trick. The aim in acquiring this knowledge base is to know how to present your business in the best possible way and how to maximize sales, traffic or engagement, using sales tactics incorporated into your website and operations, the general wording and overall visual appeal play a very significant role as well.

Outsourcing

When going this route you need to remember the following, the difference between a Graphic Designer and a Graphic Designing/Media Company is the human capital available.

A Designer – (In most cases) takes a brief of what you want and creatively interprets that info into a digital product.

A Company - Unlike a designer a company has researchers, marketing specialists and programmers which take the needs and wants of your business and formulate a brand identity that suits your business accordingly.

When outsourcing consider what you need vs how much you're prepared to part with financially and time wise.

With a Designer the burden of labour is yours when it comes to formulating your branding voice and style, if you want a functional digital product that will bring results.

Most affordable Designers don't specialize they do a generalized service that provides a standardized digital product that is good enough for the market. (If the designer is adequately skilled)

All of this considered, be sure that good branding is pricey and great branding is unaffordable to most start-up companies the reason being the amount of skills, services and labour that go into it.

To understand this, consider a new brand on the market that's not that old but is competing with the very best in the sector. Why?

Short answer... Money, lots of money! Brands of this nature are normally the product of Multinational/Large Corporations rebranding or expanding their interests.

So when outsourcing, these are my recommendations

1. Research/learn and decide on your branding then find a reputable Designer affordable to you. Then you brief them on what you expect.

Or

2. Find a reputable Company send them your business profile discuss a budget and wait for feedback. With a specialist company anything is possible weather you give an input or not, your business profile should be enough to produce a fully functional digital product.

Caution, don't go for what looks nice go for works the best. A big misconception I plan to address fully in a future eBook.

Remember - "Branding is not for you it's for your consumers/clients/customers"

C H A P T E R T H R E E

"There can be draw backs"

Safety First

There are definitely risks when trading online since most online interactions happening aren't face to face or involve any physical location, fraud and criminality thus happens virtually as much as it would in person, if not more online.

Fake Sites

These have been around for a long time and like other crimes they evolve with time. Normally happening to high value services such as banks or services with a large Customer/Client information databases

As I mentioned before it aims to collect customer information by posing as the real thing, sometimes they setup Domain names using common spelling errors of your Domain Name and wait for the unsuspecting visitors.

Usually though, they use a "spoof email" that would resemble the real one asking you to click a link in order to fix a problem

that's been presented, this link then leads to a clone site and your login details are stolen the minute you enter them.

While you might fall victim to this scam as a customer yourself, the risk as a website owner is greater because the amount of money lost is not limited to the contents of the compromised account but determined by how many people fall for it till something is done about it.

The victims will come after you for their money or blame you when their details have been compromised.

Being aware of this and trying to limit the number of click to login emails to a minimum or informing your customers/clients about checking the URL tab as a precaution is all you can do as this is unfortunately an unavoidable problem, the perpetrators are usually untraceable.

The size of your enterprise is often a determining factor in whether or not you would be an ideal target, small companies are normally targeted if they made it easy for the criminals but not usually

Stolen Credentials

If the credentials that you use to login to your website DNS Management / Hosting Services are stolen it could only be for a short time but the damage that could be done is enormous.

To protect your website from this, avoid fake sites and have a strong unique password *(never use a password twice)*. What also helps is to have the Customer Support details ready or at least know what to do if the time ever comes.

Another aspect is protecting the Customer Database by taking as many security measures as possible

DDos attacks

This is an attack that makes your website unavailable these attacks are very easy to execute so the threat is real in recent years this has been used as a form of protest against a perceived social injustice(s) or as punishment for various misdeeds companies or individuals have allegedly committed.

Ownership

When it comes to Domain Name registration most people make the mistake of intrusting the web designer with the responsibility which works out fine but not always.

Let's say you have a dispute with the person who designed / Built your website how do you gain access to the Account / DNS Management?

Perhaps no dispute happens but year after your website has been working perfectly then suddenly it goes offline and a

Landing Page that says "This domain is unavailable check DNS settings" this scenario is not a bad one if the person who registered the domain is contactable, available or willing to help.

Again the law says whomever registers the domain owns it regardless of any standing copyright or registered trademark the only way around this is litigation which could be impossible/too expensive

Always buy the domain yourself with your details then give access to the person Developing/Designing your website this eliminates most of the threat, the other thing is practicing online safety e.g. Don't use the same email and password to open an account for another site just like how I mentioned credentials can be stolen from your customer database it's the same for other websites.

END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hi! My name is Koketso Mathinjwa and I'm from Johannesburg, South Africa. I am a Multiple Media Creator and Designer with a professional background in Signage, Sales and Visual Merchandising (Retail). As a designer my main focus is branding and advertising.

My mission is to bridge the gap that exists between the well established brands with outstanding branding/use of design and the start-ups looking to make their mark in the corporate world.

What sets' me apart is the lengths I'm willing to go to expand my creative execution in all media disciplines that I'm actively & meaningfully engaged in, forever pushing my artistic forms of expressions into newer & broader horizons.

My extensive exposure to the retail sector makes me a perfect candidate for start to finish project executions; I know what products work and how a lot of consumers/customers think & expect. Having learnt countless sales techniques that are (tried, tested and refined), I design/create media & digital assets that take the entirety of prior mentioned into consideration, making the final product very function and easy to sell from the marketing department to the shop floor.

ADDITIONAL LINKS

Top Level Domain Systems

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Top-level_domain

Extensive List of Top Level Domains
https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Internet_top-level_domain

Small Business Website Statistics You Need to Know
https://topdigital.agency/2021-small-business-website-statistics-you-need-to-know/

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